

By J. H. W.

DR. WATTERS'

DOCTRINES OF LIFE.

[REPRINTED FROM THE ST. LOUIS MEDICAL AND SURGICAL JOURNAL.]

Letter from Mr. Jas. Hinton, of London.

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18 SAVILE ROW, LONDON, August 28, 1868.

*To the Editors of the St. Louis Medical and Surgical Journal:*

Gentlemen,—It is with great satisfaction that I have received from Dr. WATTERS a reprint of his paper on the *Doctrines of Life*, from your 3d and 4th Nos. for this year. My pleasure arises chiefly from seeing so vigorous a demonstration of the truth of a doctrine respecting vitality, to which I attach great importance, but also in a minor degree from finding that my own slight efforts to make it known have not been altogether overlooked. I am proud to think that my little volume, *Life in Nature*, has found even a single reader in the great region of the West; and if it be true, as Dr. WATTERS says, that “the scientific world will expect to hear from me,” even though it be only to clear myself from a justifiable suspicion of plagiarism, I shall be proud indeed. And not only proud, but glad; for indeed I have something to tell (as I hope you and Dr. WATTERS will agree) which the scientific world ought to hear.

But, first, I beg of you to allow me to make, briefly, my own personal explanations. Dr. WATTERS refers to two publications of mine, (1) a paper on the *Theory of Inflammation*, 1856;\* and (2) *Life in Nature*, 1862. When I wrote the first of these, containing one application of the “doctrine of life” (which I had previously tried in vain for two or three

\* This, we presume, should be 1858; we find the article in question in the Brit. and For. Med.-Chir. Review for July, 1858.—ED.

SURGEON GEN.

years to insinuate into the journals in other forms), I was under the impression that it was exclusively my own. It came upon me, as Dr. WATTERS describes in his own case, "like a flash;" associated, however, with the analogy, not of a clock, but with that of a whirlpool or a pendulum. Like Dr. WATTERS, I was overjoyed with the notion, and took endless pleasure in applying it to all the details of vital phenomena. But even after I succeeded in having my paper on *Inflammation* published, I did not find that the idea attracted any attention here in England; indeed I met with several persons who could not clearly see the difference between it and previous ideas. And now I became the subject of a really considerable misfortune, in which I may confidently look for the sympathy of your readers. Owing, no doubt, to my having been for some time wholly withdrawn from scientific society, the copy of his Thesis which Dr. WATTERS sent me, never came to hand; and it was not until a few months ago that I had the pleasure of receiving a brief paper of his which apprised me, for the first time, of his prior conception of the dependence of life upon decomposition. Since that time I have not troubled the public with any writings on physiology, or I would sedulously have endeavored to do Dr. WATTERS justice: a task which I, at the time requested a friend, who was about to notice Dr. WATTERS' paper in a weekly journal, to do for me; and one which could not have been distasteful to me, because I had no longer any personal interest in the matter.

For I had, several years ago, discovered that I was not the first possessor of this idea; and in the preface to *Life in Nature*, had expressly said: "I put in no claim to be anything more than a mouthpiece" in respect to the ideas contained in it. And in chapter II, pages 46—49, where this doctrine of the dependence of life on decomposition is discussed, I make special reference to three writers who had preceded me in giving expression to it. Two of these writers are Americans; both, as I now perceive, subsequent to Dr. WATTERS; and the reason that I quoted the later and omitted the earlier (to my present great regret) was, simply, that I knew no more. The two American writers quoted, Dr. LE CONTE and Dr. HENRY, had come before the English public in a way in which, at that time, Dr. WATTERS had not. I am sure that he, and all who feel with him and myself, that I did him an unwitting injustice, will accept my apology. How Dr. WATTERS' name came to be absent from the American publications to which I made reference, I do not know.

But, passing from this personal matter, on which I am sorry to have said so much, and for which I will lose no opportunity of making amends, I am very happy to draw the attention of Dr. WATTERS and your readers to the third person to whom reference is made in my volume, as having published, before me, the doctrine of the dependence of life on decomposition. I will quote a few of his words: "Death is essentially a part of life. It is the transit of the organizing influence from the organizing atom which causes that atom's death. It is the transit of the same organizing influence to that atom's type which gives to that type its life. But it is during, and alone during such transit, that conjointly the two atoms live. . . . Thus are two opposite processes, of necessity, concerned in



producing the phenomena of actual life, . . . and thus, too, it becomes apparent how death is a part of life." Much more to the same effect might be quoted, but I doubt not that these sentences are enough, and that behind the peculiar phraseology (connected with other ideas which I need not here detail) the identity of thought will be recognized at once.

But these words were published in 1848, and their author is Dr. FREKE, of Dublin.\*

It gives me the greatest pleasure, in which no one, I am sure, will more heartily share than Dr. WATTERS (who in the world of thought is wealthy enough to be generous) to do this act of justice to a discoverer to whom we owe more than can yet be known, but whose only reward hitherto has been neglect. Even I, who came so long after, am (thanks to Dr. WATTERS) a little known in connection with this grand thought; but the man upon whom, so far as I am aware, it *first* dawned, and who devoted great powers and great labor to its development, has received no acknowledgment of its value. It is a matter for regret and for rectification. I said he had received *no* acknowledgment, but perhaps I was wrong. He had received that best acknowledgment, of seeing it caught up and borne witness to by other minds, and has that best reward—the consciousness of work well done, of seed laid up for future fruitfulness. Your readers will with pleasure recognize in him an instance of *dormant vitality*, on which they can test the value of the opposing theories.

I have forwarded to Dr. WATTERS a copy of a small volume published by Dr. FREKE in 1861, "On the Origin of Species," with the view of calling attention to views so long previously put forth by him.

It gives me great satisfaction to make this feeble attempt to do justice to a citizen of a Sister-Isle; but I rejoice still more to recognize in these successive flashes of the same idea, first in Ireland, then in America, then in England, proofs that the idea itself has its origin in truth, and is written deep in nature.

I am, Gentlemen,

Your obedient servant,

JAMES HINTON.

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\* FREKE on Organization, Dublin, 1848.

